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THE PRICE OF CHANGE

*An address by
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on the occasion
of the first
Commencement
of
Essex County College
Newark, New Jersey*

N. J. REFERENCE DIVISION

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Essex County College, a comprehensive community college sponsored by the people of Essex County through its Board of Freeholders, first opened its doors to students in September, 1968.

For further information about the college—its programs, plans, and potential for the city, county, and state it serves—contact:

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I want to speak on the price of change. I think that an occasion of this sort, a commencement exercise, is the kind of a brief moment that we should take to make an assessment and to check our bearings. It seems like a waste; indeed, by garbing ourselves in these medieval costumes, this is really an anachronism not in keeping with the style of the times. But we do these things in order to signify that we are separating from the immediacy of things and pulling ourselves apart to make an assessment.

This is not a new thing or a strange thing, for there are many simple analogies that come to mind; before the surgeon picks up his scalpel and begins to cut on a vital organ, he pauses and he checks with the internist about the patient's blood pressure, his sugar level, his cardiograph, his tolerance for the anesthetic to be used, and how successful he has been with previous illnesses. An architect will go to a building site and spread out his plans on a wide steel beam. The hammering and digging all cease because there needs to be a pause to get direction and to find out what's really happening. A coach stops his team in the midst of a long, warm drive to see where failure may be threatening or where victory may lie.

Tumultuous Times

Here we are at the close of perhaps the most tumultuous year that colleges have seen in recent times. Historians will likely call it the most creative year, even though it has served to disrupt college operations for the past two months. A description of the events would be superfluous, for we've all lived through them, we've witnessed them, and many of us have been participants.

Change is everywhere, and no one will make it through the next few months who cannot see this in some meaningful perspective. You just can't sit and be intelligent and do nothing but wring your hands, and moan and groan about change and about the television flooding the atmosphere with the news of change and confrontation. Sooner or later to maintain your own sanity you'll have to make sense of what's going on.

Now here is how I view it. I have taken my two small sons to the zoo on many occasions, and I am always curious about the animals that they like to see. I am trying to understand what there is about certain animals that children really like. The animals that they like to gaze at the longest and the hardest are the alligators and crocodiles, then the hump-back camel, and then the kangaroo. These all look like nature's worst mistakes. They are the funniest looking natural disasters in the zoo. There seems to be no excuse for their existence. If they were not protected by game laws and by zoo keepers, they would all be turned promptly into shoes and pocketbooks and long leather coats and jackets. They are really in a sense parasitical animals in our economy because they are kept around merely as curios.

But now, if you talk with a zoologist who knows more about it than that, he sees something else in these animals and in their strange shapes and forms. He sees each one as an important link in the whole long evolutionary spiral. He sees them as somehow important in the connections between the jellyfish and a Socrates, or an Einstein, or a Leonardo Da Vinci, or a Martin Luther King, or a Malcolm X. What looks like a useless mutation in the spiral, given the stuff with which nature must work, turns out to be

an indispensable link between one form of life and a higher form. The spinal column, for example, took eons to develop. You're talking in terms of millions of years, and a camel was a part of that process. Lungs had to supplant gills in the amphibious animals, and while an alligator looks like a waste, it took him to move us out of our salt water environment to establish us as land-living creatures. A kangaroo may seem like an exaggeration of one kind or another, but after all, when we first moved to dry land, it wasn't easy to get around and some animals overdid it.

Turmoil Marks Creative Transition

My friends, somehow we need to clear our vision and see the turmoil of today as this kind of a creative transition between an old order that is dying and another order that is straining to be born. No one could predict, for example, that it would take a long cruel war, and a bill of rights, and a declaration of independence, a constitutional convention, and the shelling of Norfolk by Lord Dunmore and all the rest to get rid of the tobacco tax, the tea tax, and King George III and his men. Who knew that John Bunyan would have to write *Pilgrim's Progress*, Milton would have to write the *Areo Pagitica*, and John Huss would have to be waxed and burned to establish the freedom of the press and the freedom of religion? Who could foresee the Civil War as a prerequisite for holding the Union together? It took Nat Turner's raid and Denmark Vesey's revolt to make slavery untenable, along with many others. Galileo and Copernicus suffered at the hands of the Church to establish a beachhead for modern physics. Fermi was condemned for his experiments

to prove the existence of microscopic bacteria. All modern medicine now rests on his work. Every quantum leaped in the sojourn of man from darkness to light, from slavery to freedom, from oppression to liberty, has been a costly and turbulent move. This is indeed the price of change.

Change Must Come

Now here we are in the midst of another series of major changes. These changes have got to come. This war in Vietnam is the beginning of the end of 300 or more years of colonial rule in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. It began with Gandhi, and then Nkrumah, and their compatriots, but it is not finished yet. The whole system by which the metropolitan powers of Europe stretch their domain over people who are unprepared to fight is coming to an end. Puppet governments all over the world, colonial offices, home leaves, and the whole colonial paraphernalia—all of this is dying. It is taking a while, but the readjustments in French Indo-China must be seen as part of the funeral of colonialism. So really, in the long run, what happens on the military front from day to day is relatively inconsequential. There will be no way for man to move ahead carrying along the baggage of an anachronistic institution like colonial rule in Asia, in Africa, and in Latin America. Next, the legacy of the slave system has been racism in America. It, too, dies too slowly, and much of what we see on campuses and in the city streets all over the country is a part of that social evolution between the society with a rigid caste system and a society of equality and justice. And third, the redistribution of the world's wealth is now on the agenda. Men are reluctant to sur-

render or to share an advantage, but what goes under the name of urban problems is nothing more than the process of redistributing advantages in America.

Now we need to examine these briefly, to see what some of the subtleties are and how these relate to young people graduating from a college and moving out to take their place in the society of the State of New Jersey, North Jersey in particular, and Essex County.

Examine Colonialism

Look at this whole institution of colonialism and see how anachronistic it is, and then see how it rattles the rattle of death for so long. It dies so slowly because it was a tight and highly ramified system. One doesn't understand colonialism until he moves around in West Africa and in Asia. He sees oil wells pumping night and day, and he sees piles of ground nuts waiting for a freight train to come by and haul them to the market. He sees Africans climbing rubber trees and putting their buckets out while the rubber just drips in the pail. He's got to see all of these things to understand that there's no correlation at all between the raw materials produced in these countries and the living conditions of the people. Here they are scratching every day, all day long, merely to stay alive until nightfall; yet chocolate, cocoa, tin, magnesium, oil, all of these things, move constantly toward the port cities and are loaded on ships and taken off to ply the seven seas. All of that has got to stop somehow. The quality of life in these countries has got to be changed.

I think you've got to be there to feel it. I remember one day during Peace Corps times when I was riding along in one of

our American Volkswagon buses that we used in the Peace Corps, and I had a Nigerian driver, a young man who was proud of his job. If you want to see the influence of colonialism on these countries, understand that the very fact that he was driving a Volkswagon micro-bus for an American official made him feel that he was above everybody he saw. That's what colonialism does to the mentality of the people.

Don't Run The Girl Down!

Now here was a little girl coming across a bridge carrying a bucket of water on her head. I had no idea that on a single lane bridge this young Nigerian would run this girl down. So as we approached her, I just didn't say anything. I had my feet propped up, half asleep on a sultry West African day; and I said, "What's going to happen to the girl?" He said that she must move; and I said, "You stop this bus right now!" And he said "Why?" He even calls me master! Rather than say "mister" or "boss" or whatever, they use that term. He said, "Why master?" I said, "You can't run this girl down with a bucket of water!"

He paid no mind at all, like it was his bounden duty to show that as a driver for a foreign or European power he was superior to everything. I'm telling you what the mentality is that has come upon people who fall under colonial rule. Now, this girl ran, and she spilled the water everywhere, and left the pail on the bridge.

We crossed the bridge, and I said, "Stop the bus and let's have a talk." I asked where did she—the little girl, 12, 13, 14 years old—where did she get the water from. He said, "I don't know, master." I said: "I'll tell you what you're going to do;

if you're going to keep this job; I'm going to sit right here on this side of the bridge while you go and find that girl. Find out where she got that water from, take this bus, take her back to the river, get her another pail of water, take her where she's going, and then you come back and pick me up."

He never did understand the reason for that, but I'll tell you; something boils up all over inside me when I see people with an arbitrary advantage crushing people who have been born with an arbitrary disadvantage. And so this whole institution must change.

I'll tell you something else that's amusing. I had one of my Nigerian friends come and see me one day and say he was going on home leave. I said, "You're going on home leave? Well, where are you going?" He was going to England. I said, "Is that your home?" Well, now what happens is this: when the British come out there, they stay on a little while and then they go back every couple of years or so for a home leave. They get paid a salary, and they get paid their passage back and forth. And the term "home leave" has gotten to be so ground into the consciousness of the people that here was a Nigerian whose home was a few miles up the road, and he tells me he's going on home leave, and surely enough, he does! He goes on to London and follows through the whole logic.

I'm saying to you that colonialism has done something to the minds of the people. So much so that the energy and the imagination that ought to go into nation-building has been taken out of the people's consciousness and taken out of the people's aspiration, and altogether too many of them have settled for this colonial mentality.

Racism Anachronistic

Now the same thing is true with the anachronism of racism in America. Ground into the culture, ground into the church life, ground into the Veterans of Foreign Wars, the American Legion, the Masonic lodges, everything bears the sign and the mark, and the scars, of racism. You ask a man if he's a Presbyterian. "Yes." "What kind of a Presbyterian? U.S. or U.S.A.?" That divides them between the North and the South, and all of that has to do with the whole question of race. Ask a man if he's a Baptist, Northern or Southern? Because that's got to do also with race. The whole country bears in some way the scars of long-term, galvanized racism.

Now that's very easy to say. The question is how do we extricate ourselves from this, and what are the paths away from these hardened stereotypes? You know as I do that Blacks were assigned an economic class that became self-destructive, destroying their self-image.

Dignity Means Self-determination

In order for man to have dignity he has to be self-determining. He needs to have control over his future, he needs to have some control over his use of leisure time, his moments of contemplation should belong to him; but when a man has to scratch for living all day long, when his work does not fire his imagination, then it dehumanizes him from seven o'clock in the morning until five o'clock at night. It's very difficult for him to turn around and become another kind of being from five o'clock at night until bedtime.

Religion and culture have also helped to

harden and to galvanize the whole institution of racism. This came about because the religion that the Black people inherited was not the religion of the historic Jesus and the eighth century prophets. It was the religion of apocalypticism. It had to do with eschatology, with something other-worldly. It didn't have to do with that Jesus who walked the dusty roads of Galilee, and who healed the sick, and who made the lame to walk and the blind to see. We inherited not the religion that was prophetic in the Judeo-Christian stream; we inherited something else, the sacerdotalism of Christianity, causing one to forget this world and to think about the joys that are going to come when we cross the chilly streams of the Jordan. And so, the stereotype then begins to harden because we not only were assigned to a low economic class and status but this was further assured by guaranteeing that we would not be bothered with wanting things in this world. I remember a hymn we used to sing that said, "If the world from you withhold of its silver and its gold then you have to get along with meagre fare. Just remember in His Word how He feeds the little bird: take your burdens to the Lord, and leave them there." Now this kind of thing, instead of preparing black people to assume responsibility for their development has made racism and discrimination self-perpetuating.

What happens if you have a low estimation of yourself? You have a job assigned to you that is commensurate with that low estimation, you are given a house and a school that are also commensurate with that, and then you have a religion that does not feed you with the ethical dimensions for change. This will roll all over on its own momentum and nobody has to touch it; it'll take care of itself.

Cry for Change

Today we have to have some kind of an intervention; there must be a cry for changes in jobs, and of course that means changes in education. Changes in education and changes in jobs will give one an appetite for a nicer place to live. That means changes in housing, and all of these changes will have to be accompanied by a certain kind of political power that will cause them to be implementable. So there's no point in starting at any one point on this spiral because indeed it is a spiral, and one has to start at all points at one time.

Finally, let us look at the redistribution of advantages, the goods and services. As far as I'm concerned the term revolution applied to this needs much further definition because, in our kind of a society, it's going to be difficult to define the terms of revolution. What do I mean by that? I mean that we have a technology imposed upon us, so much so that, if we decided to redistribute goods and services, the people who needed new opportunities the most would have been crippled by an education that frightened them out of mathematics, frightened them out of the hard sciences, and therefore rendered them ill-prepared to take advantage of what would come to them in a revolution if it should break freely upon us.

"Start Where I Am"

Let me illustrate. Most of our young people have indeed been frightened out of the hard sciences. For example, you can take the biological sciences. Why I remember when I started high school science.

We started out naming all of the leaves of the trees of the forest as if we were going to start an arboretum somewhere. Finally we got around to photosynthesis and things like that, but I was stuck with these leaves, and here I had a body I didn't understand. I had a fever and I wanted to take an aspirin; I didn't know where an aspirin came from, I didn't know why aspirin reduced body temperatures; all of these marvelous things about my own body I didn't know, and there I was fooling around sticking a needle in a frog's leg after it had been dipped in formaldehyde. See, if only my teachers had started off saying, "Open your mouth, I want to see all of your teeth; I want to show you what sugar does to the enamel on the tooth!" Start somewhere where I am, and then you can move me out to something else later on.

The fact is that your kind of college has a peculiar responsibility to take all of this mumbo jumbo and hocus pocus out of the sciences and mathematics and help people who come from our urban centers to understand that there's not that much mystery about the world of nature and natural processes. As a matter of fact, it's beautiful when we begin to understand it.

Unnecessary Mysteries

You know what I learned from science? When my older boy had a congenital heart condition, my wife and I went to Johns Hopkins Hospital—36 different round trips, and finally he was ready for surgery. I asked, "Doctor, please tell me now what is it that you say he's got?" And the doctor looked at me. He just looked at me, and concluded that it wasn't important to go into details. He said, "He's got tetralogy

of fallau." I said, "Just a minute, doctor. Now I've had nine years of Greek and four years of Latin, and I know what tetralogy is. That means four things we ought to know something about." He said, "Yes." I continued: "Now what's this Fallau business?" He said, "That's a French doctor's name who discovered it. What he's really got is four things wrong with the heart that a French doctor first discovered." "Now would you just pause," I said, "and tell me what are those four things?" And he explained them to me. I said, "Now what's the surgical procedure?" He said, "He's got to have surgery for an intra-ventricular septal defect." And I said, "All right, doctor." And I held him by the elbow. I said, "You haven't lost me yet. That intra means 'in-between,' and that 'ventricular' means ventricle, and 'septal' is a hole, that's all there is. And, a defect means there's something wrong with the hole between the ventricles, is that right?" He said, "How did you guess?" I said, "I just told you I had nine years of Greek and four years of Latin and that's all you're talking. And another thing, doctor; it's not that complicated. Suppose you had just said to me, 'Listen you've got a ventricle; the stale blood from the body comes in one side and the fresh clean blood from the lungs in the other side. When you haven't been born there is no way to have a problem here because you're not breathing. All the blood is mixed, and the hole is there to give you one great big chamber; but when you take your first breath of air, the great God of nature has fixed it so that the hole ought to close. If it doesn't close, then for the rest of your life the fresh blood from your lungs and the stale blood from your body will mix and you'll never have a clean fresh supply of blood. Your brain won't get nice clean

fresh blood, and your bones won't get it, your muscles won't get it, and you'll be sick.' It's very simple. You can explain that to a child 10 or 12 years old."

But you see we need people in education who will be vicarious enough to stand in somebody else's place long enough to learn their idioms, learn their jargon, and then take great concepts out of science and history and humanities and break them down so that we can induct new people into the educational process.

Education Once Exclusive

Now, years before education was for the "big" people's children, for the people who had already educated their children, at home. It's been keyed to class and a very few people. A handful, who had some peculiar motivation, began to escape the class boundaries and arrive at high positions in life because of education. But generally, it was not for everybody, and so turmoil on campus is all related to this enlarging of educational opportunity. People don't like to hear children screaming about it, and students yelling about it. But we need to pause and ponder that what they're asking to do is to change the longstanding tradition in America that advantages tend to go to those who already have an advantage.

Turmoil Price of Change

I conclude by saying again that this is the price of change. What we call turmoil may turn out to be one of the most creative periods in American history when we are seeing the end of colonialism and racism and a redistribution of opportunity in

our society. In the same way that we've got to get used to those kangaroos, and giraffes, and hump-back camels, and alligators, those strange mutations that came along in the biological sequence, we've got to get used to these other kinds of things that take place in the process of social evolution.

You know there's a little flower called a night-blooming lily that blooms only at night. I remember the first time a lady showed me one of these, this flower seemed somehow to defy explanation; other flowers lay their petals open at dawn, and by high noon they are blushing before the blinding light of the sun. But this flower hides its gorgeous designs until darkness descends. It waits for the moist of the night air, the decrease in ultra-violet rays, and the slowing down of photosynthesis, and then it comes into blossom. Then, as if it really didn't care about being seen so much as that it just wanted to be true to itself, it knew what it needed and it quietly unfolds and it reveals a beauty that it has never produced under ordinary circumstances.

And so I say that as we seek to move into the reality of a truly democratic society, one that relieves all men of arbitrary impediments, one that erases the legacy of slavery and racism, and colonialism, we are heading toward something novel in history.



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